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Reflection: “Progressive Education” – William Heard Kilpatrick (John Holt)

I chose to look at “progressive education,” believes that students should in active in a guided learning environment. In these environments, teachers are encouraged to lead their students to learning, not bring the learning to them. The main points of “progressive education” are stated as follows on Wikipedia.org:

* Emphasis on learning by doing – hands-on-projects, expeditionary learning, experimental learning
* Integrated curriculum focused on thematic units
* Integration of entrepreneurship in to education
* Strong emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking
* Group work and development of social skills
* Understanding and action as the goals of learning as opposed to rote knowledge
* Collaborative and cooperative learning projects
* Education for social responsibility and democracy
* Highly personalized education accounting for each individual’s personal goals
* Integration of community service and service learning projects into the daily curriculum
* Selection of subject content by looking forward to ask what skills will be needed in future society
* De-emphasis on textbooks in favor of varied learning resources
* Emphasis on lifelong learning and social skills
* Assessment by evaluation of child’s projects and productions

These points bring up several issues, the main ones being entrepreneurship in education, development of social skills, education focused on responsibility and democracy, a de-emphasis on textbooks, and assessment by evaluation of a child’s projects and productions.

Bringing entrepreneurship into education is very risky proposition. You face problems similar to the issues of a free market; market dominance can mean complete control over the mechanics of that market. Being a business of education, that could have disastrous consequences on the students of that education system (i.e. conforming curriculum, giving people less than what they pay for, other abuses of power). However, like a free market, there are beneficial aspects of an economic educational system. Universities are a shining example of how these schools can run. The United States suffers from a strange hybrid of these two schools. It should also be noted that college education in the US is substantially more expensive than in other countries.

Focusing education on social skills holds potential for a few different outcomes. Primary and secondary school focusing on these activities could not handle well the social “introverts” of the population. Forcing a child out of their comfort zone at such a young age could have consequences on their social development. However, social schools of interaction have significant benefits as well. Social ideas, projects, and governments are important in running a large, scale society and can help avoid creating isolated thinking. The same could be said by teaching focused on responsibility and democracy.